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## Bush Facing Deep Divide Over More Troops for Iraq

By DAVID E. SANGER and JEFF ZELENY

WASHINGTON, Jan. 5 — The new Democratic leaders of the Senate and the House warned President Bush on Friday against sending additional troops to Iraq, setting the stage for what could become a major confrontation over a new war strategy.

Mr. Bush is expected to call for more troops in a speech as soon as Wednesday, as part of a renewed effort to secure Baghdad. But Nancy Pelosi, the new speaker of the House, and Harry Reid, the new Senate majority leader, dismissed that approach as a strategy “that has already failed.”

“Adding more combat troops will only endanger more Americans and stretch our military to the breaking point for no strategic gain,” Mrs. Pelosi and Mr. Reid wrote in a letter to Mr. Bush. “We are well past the point of more troops for Iraq,” they added, urging Mr. Bush to begin a “phased redeployment,” or gradual withdrawal.

Not all Democrats agree with the position their leaders staked out in the letter on Friday, just days before Mr. Bush is expected to announce a broad strategy involving more troops, accelerated training of Iraqi forces and a large increase in economic and reconstruction aid to Iraq. But the release of the letter suggests that a major political battle may be brewing.

Mr. Bush appeared to be trying to head off any confrontation when he invited 13 Democratic and Republican senators to the White House Friday for what administration officials called a “consultation” on Iraq.

At a later meeting, Mr. Bush met with the former chairman of the Armed Services Committee, Senator John W. Warner, Republican of Virginia, who cautioned that Congress would want to take time to consider the strategy before Mr. Bush began implementing it.

“The president has had this opportunity now for some weeks, and I think Congress is entitled to an opportunity to independently look at the situation,” Mr. Warner said.

Mr. Bush has begun to put parts of his plan in place, making official on Friday some changes

that will insure new faces are associated with a new approach.

He announced the nomination of Lt. Gen. David H. Petraeus as the new commander in Iraq, to succeed Gen. George W. Casey Jr., whom Mr. Bush said he intended to elevate to Army chief of staff.

Mr. Bush praised General Casey, who spent much of 2006 pressing for a gradual withdrawal of troops, as "strong and effective"; he hailed General Petraeus, who has reportedly backed an increase, as "a soldier of vision and determination."

Mr. Bush is also remaking his diplomatic team, nominating John D. Negroponte, the director of national intelligence, to be deputy secretary of state.

Ryan C. Crocker is expected to be nominated ambassador to Iraq. His nomination would for the first time place an Arabist with experience in sectarian conflicts, mostly in Lebanon, at the head of the embassy in Baghdad.

Administration and Congressional officials said they expected the military and diplomatic nominations to receive Senate approval, though senators might use the hearings to air dissent about any troop increase and draw attention to the perceived failings of Iraq strategy.

The bigger question is whether Congress will seek to stop the troop increase. In theory, it could cut off financing, the only way it could actually interfere with the commander in chief's plans. But Democrats have said they would not take such a step, largely out of fear of being accused of undercutting the troops.

That leaves them with only one option: holding a series of hearings, which start next week, immediately after the president's speech, that are intended to expose the divisions within the military over the wisdom of increasing troops. Many senior officers, including General Casey, have argued that adding American troops will undercut the effort to get the Iraqi government to defend itself.

Some Republican leaders insisted that Congress should not go down that path. "I don't think that we should be dictating military strategy in Iraq from Capitol Hill," said Representative John A. Boehner of Ohio, the Republican minority leader in the House.

In addition to the 13 senators, Democrats and Republicans, invited to the White House on Friday afternoon, those attending the meeting included Vice President Dick Cheney, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, the Joint Chiefs chairman, Gen. Peter Pace, and Stephen J. Hadley,

the national security adviser.

Senators [Hillary Rodham Clinton](#) of New York and [Barack Obama](#) of Illinois, who both are considering a presidential candidacy, arrived at the White House at nearly the same time. After the meeting, Mrs. Clinton did not issue a statement, while Mr. Obama spoke to reporters about his conversation with Mr. Bush.

"I personally indicated that an escalation of troop levels in Iraq was a mistake and that we need a political accommodation, rather than a military approach to the sectarian violence there," he said. "I think he recognizes that the status quo is unacceptable and has to change."

Senator [Mary L. Landrieu](#), a Louisiana Democrat, said she would consider supporting an increase in troops for a short time if the president could articulate "specific opportunities for success," particularly cities that troops would be dispatched to and how long they would stay. Ms. Landrieu also said she would need to be convinced that there was a broader solution to limit American involvement in Iraq.

"The American people's patience is wearing thin with the vagueness," she said, speaking to reporters as she left the White House.

In interviews after the meeting, several senators said they could not tell whether Mr. Bush had made a decision whether to call for a troop increase. The senators described the meeting as frank but not confrontational. But even those who have supported the administration's Iraq policy said it was time for a change of course.

"I don't know that the American people will see the surge as a new direction," said Senator [Ben Nelson](#), a Democrat from Nebraska. "The American people want to see a change in direction, not just a change in slogans."

Senator [Blanche Lincoln](#), an Arkansas Democrat at the meeting, said an increase in troops would face considerable scrutiny in Congress from Democrats and Republicans.

"I asked the president, 'Where would that surge come from?'" Ms. Lincoln said. "He said that was a very good question."

*Thom Shanker and Sheryl Gay Stolberg contributed reporting.*

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